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AMERICAN HISTORY AND FOLKLORE USED AS BACKGROUND MATERIAL IN AMERICAN LITTLE THEATRE PLAYS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The subject under advisement is one of great interest to the writer. Since her delving into it and reading numerous plays, the interest has grown. We have by no means exhausted the subject, but the information contained upon these pages is a reasonable portion of that which is to be located.

Washington, the immortal, the statuesque; Lincoln, the unorthodox Christian, the "uncouth rail-splitter;" the folk of the mountains, the folk ofthe deep south - all have contributed their part to the traditions and folklore of America.

The problem: The problem in this study is to determine (1) how American history and (2) American folklore have formed a basis for Little Theatre plays.

Procedure: The procedure has been (1) to make a study of representative dramatic literature which had as its central characters men and women renowned in the pages of history and (2) to study the drama prepared for the Little Theatre stage from an "on the spot" vantage point by men whose sympathies stretched to the unexplored fastnesses of the mountainous sections of our country and brought out their quaint ways to face the world.

PART I

THE LITTLE THEATRE AND ITS USE OF FOLKLORE MATERIAL

Before giving a synopsis of the plays figuring in the study, it would be well to have some idea of the significance of the terms used herein.

Early American dramatists presented the Shakespearean and Restoration dramas for a great number of years. In 1910, however, a craze for Little Theatres sprang into being and through the efforts of the Drama Club of Evanston, Illinois, the Drama League of America was organized. The professional actor had held full sway on the American stage to this date, but now need was found for a channel through which the amateur actor might find expression. New material was found for him and little theatres sprang up everywhere. Saloons were sacrificed and their bars turned into stages; they were found on the wharf at Provincetown, Massachusetts and in the Western agricultural colleges.

Through this effort, a very definite community spirit was developed and the living play was born. There was a greater desire for self expression; a greater desire to see oneself in one's own image. In this, an individual has a chance to allow his human nature to escape from his will. In other words, if we would have our own drama appeal to an audience we must write

of those things that are close to those people. On the other hand we might treat the historical personages or persons of great romances.

As a result of the Little Theatre movement, drama was taught in the schools and colleges. Now the college Little Theatre receives great attention in the realm of amateur theatricals. Little Theatre groups can be found in practically every community of any size showing that people enjoy self-expression; enjoy seeing themselves as they are; their lives portrayed upon the stage.

What began as an experiment has grown into a marvelous development of community spirit. The Little Theatres were little in the beginning because the groups were small and they could afford no more. Now, however, the groups have grown, the space has grown, consequently the Little Theatre movement has become a colossal, country-wide enterprise over a period of thirty-two years.

The Little Theatre groups have proven their worth through the development of new lighting methods, the discovery of new actors and playwrights, and the effective, practical wisdom of the content of their plays.

"The term "Little Theatre" then is applied broadly to bodies which engage, more or less regularly, in dramatic production and which are animated by intrinsic enjoyment rather than by monetary gain." [1]

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1. Clarence Arthur Perry, The work of Little Theatres, p. 9

It has been found that Americans like best those plays which they choose and produce because they best reflect the true American taste. For this reason, plays of a historical nature always appeal to the American public. They appeal also because they soften the dry, hard narration of facts given in histories by portraying the characters of historical events clothed in the warmth of humanity as opposed to the lifeless, iron-clad portrayals in texts. This will be illustrated in several instances in subsequent topics.

Folklore is the peculiar expression of native or local passion, of the superstitions, beliefs and traditions of people in language characteristic of the sections of the country depicted.

Approximately three hundred years after the beginnings of the theatre in this country, playwrights began to realize the ineffectiveness of their drama. A rennaissance came about in the theatre and the very poverty of our dramatic foundations sent playwrights back to the soil for subject matter for their new native drama. It is flourishing, for people like to listen to and absorb the homely, but effective philosophy with which such plays are filled. They can appreciate them more thoroughly because they are "down to earth" and spoken in a common, easily understood language. Their very beauty and charm lies in their simplicity of theme.

Drama is folk passion. When this passion is expressed in language peculiar to the folk about whom the play is written, the playwright has discovered the nucleus of local life and outlook, and thus has scored a dramatic triumph.

Professor Frederick Koch, a true desciple of the new native drama, urged his students to write about their own surroundings, to "write about those things they know". He further advised them to "make use of the soil beneath your feet, the tradition in your hearts, the struggle in your soul and the breath in your hills." They did just that as have numerous other playwrights in recent years.

New England, the Kentucky mountains, the Southern Negro, the Appalachian Mountains and the old South itself were taken from the midst of the formal customs in which they had been ensconced and given to the world from a realistic, a sympathetically realistic point of view. The soil became the real foundation for folk drama.

The play based upon folklore has a universal appeal and gives the actor a chance to rise above ordinary conversation. The speech used in such plays has a plaintive peculiarity that is delightful and gives the real actor a chance to bring into full play his histrionic aptitudes.

As far as records can reveal, the term "folk-play" was first used in the American theatre when the Carolina Playmakers announced "Carolina Folk Plays" on the playbill of their first production in Chapel Hill twenty-three years ago. This type of play was enthusiastically accepted.

Among the first productions were the Dakota plays. They were admittedly unpolished and unrefined, but never-the-less frank and free from deception. They were simple folk plays painting the life of people near to the honest, strong, "windswept" soil; the long, distressful winters in the old sod shanty.

Upon further study another side was discovered. They were found to sing of the spring-time peculiar only to the prairie; of the bold, unhampered sunshine; of the wildernesses over-run with wild roses and the wide open fields swelling with the songs of birds on wing. They bespoke too, the toil and accomplishments of a pioneer people. It is evident that there is nothing unusual in the dramatic. It is a daily occurrence in all our lives. It has merely to be properly corraled by alert and apt minds to make it appealing from the footlights.

The secret of writing the "folk-play" lies in the ability of the writer to observe carefully the locality in which he finds himself; its people and their customs, expressions and mannerisms. The art comes in a faithful and honest interpretation of his observations. He can, with the proper understanding, interpret their lives to the public in expressive images and thus produce, what in time will become, a universal art.

Upon this principle is built the Carolina Playmakers' methods of writing their plays. From familiar scenes; from youthful adventures; from folk tales and from common tradition as well as the current life in North Carolina they have woven the threads of the most successful of folk plays.

The term "folk" as it is used, applies chiefly to the use of folk subject matter such as legends, customs, superstitions, environmental conditions or differences, and the provincialisms and colloquialisms of the common people. The resulting play is, for the most part, realistic and human, but on the other hand, is sometimes sentimental and poetic in type. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is an example of the sentimental folk play.

The folk dramatists' chief interest lies in man's prolonged contest with the forces of "Mother Nature" and his humble pleasure in being alive. This conflict is not superficially evident in action upon the stage, but the audience, at the close of the production, is aware of the subtly presented "earth-rooted" life of ordinary humanity.

The Carolina Playmakers, the pioneers in the field of folk drama, were entirely unselfish with their new project or idea. They conceived the idea that the movement should become national, and perhaps, international in scope. As a result, folk-playwrights have developed in the United States, Canada, and Mexico through the organization of the Bureau of Community Drama, a unit of the Extension Division. Correspondence, play-lending and bulletin service ensued, but the demand was so great that a traveling Field Director was employed "to assist schools and rural communities in the writing and production of plays, pageants and festivals."[1]

"Funeral Flowers for the Bride" won first place in the International One-Act Play Competition held in England in 1938. There were more than one hundred sixty-six entries. The same play was professionally produced at the Duchess Theatre in London on November the twenty-seventh of the same year.

Later a Chinese student, became a member of the Carolina Playmakers and produced a delightfully refreshing Chinese folk-play entitled "The Thrice Promised Bride," a play combining "romance, comedy, and poetry."

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1. Frederick H. Koch, Carolina Folk Plays, p. XII

Apparently, Brooks Atkinson's observations, that our country is rich in folk-lore material and should produce rich drama and a national theatre to serve the country and create a greater national understanding, were on the way to being materialized.

It is thus evident, that a movement had been started that would partially rid the Little Theatre stages of the scintillating, superficial drama of the moneyed people. The Little Theatre would cease, to an extent, to be a vehicle or weapon with which to depict class struggle in battle against poverty, unemployment and racial oppression. New enthusiasm, vigor and talent replaced the former conflict and new audiences were attracted to the theatres because they could understand and appreciate the naturalness and honesty of the new productions.

PART II

THE INDIAN

The North American Indian has furnished a bit of material for Little Theatre productions. He is not popular material, however, because he has so often been painted through literature as a "disreputable vagabond" eking a living out of thievery and by manufacturing ornaments. He has been shown as a hunter, a murderer, a dastardly creature. This type of picturization is a poor basis for a theatre piece written for the purpose of pleasing the public.

Some dramatists have, however, shown sympathy in the treatment of their Indian characters and thus they have served as interesting material despite the fact that there is no progression in Indian dramas. The playwright sympathized with the Indian because of the raw, unjust treatment which he received at the hands of the white man. The forceful, persuasive discourse in these plays is centered about such injustices. This is evidenced in N. H. Bannister's "Putnam, the Iron Son of '76" as Onectah says of his departed son: "When first upon this throbbing heart thy mother placed thee, peace, like a dove smiled oe'r the land, and the hatchet was buried deep in the earth, the club of death lay idle in the wigwam of my fathers, and the red and white men were friends. He has no home now save the habitation of the reptile in the murky thicket, no hope but to die, no thought save one, and that is vengeance!

Hear it, ye unseen spirits of my departed fathers: look upon the land ye took as masters, let the souls of the past inspire the last drooping limb of the falling tree to wreak upon its destroyer vengeance eternal as the red light in heaven; inspire me to conquer or die."

Longfellow's poem "Hiawatha" has enjoyed wondrous popularity, but in the interim has served to create great confusion with regard to the reputed Iroquois hero, Hiawatha. He is found to be represented as an historical character, as a mythical demi-god and as belonging to both the Iroquois and the Algonquins. In actual history and in myth he is of equally great importance. The truth of the matter is that Longfellow followed Schoolcraft to a certain extent and in so doing has confused two entirely different individuals in the character of Hiawatha; one the altogether mythical Manabozho, or Michabo, and the other historical Hiawatha. (Longfellow had first intended to call his poem Michabo).

According to tradition, Manabozho was a demigod of the Ojibways, and to him, not to Hiawatha, belongs the credit for the heroic deeds described in the poem. It is to be expected that myths have grown up around the name of the Iroquois hero, for it is myth which legitimately binds together the remnants of historical material and gives it a touch of vivid suggestiveness. Nevertheless, there is solid fact at the bases of the legendary stories of Hiawatha even to the point of establishing an actual date for his period of activity by some modern American historians.

Hiawatha, originally called Hai-en-Wat-ha, was a chief of Iroquois stock and belonged either to the Onondaga or the Mohawk tribe. His most important accomplishment was the union of the Five Nations of the Iroquois into a Grand League. This event was of great national significance since it influenced to a great extent the destiny of European peoples when they fought for American supremacy. In as much as the Five Nations are known to have organized in the sixteenth century, it is reasonable to believe that Hiawatha must have lived and worked about that time.

When the Iroquois, or "Long House People" were discovered by the French and Dutch, they occupied the western section of what is now New York State. At the time they had reached a much more advanced stage of culture than most Indian tribes. They cultivated the soil raising crops of maize and tobacco, and were skilled in the art of combat and diplomatic affairs. Their strength was attributed to the existence of the Grand League allegedly founded by Hiawatha and were, consequently, the most important of the North American tribes. We like to think of the Iroquois statesman as a real man, an outstanding leader among people reared in an age of ignorance and barbarism.

One author explains, in defense of the Indian, that no real difference exists between the tribes of men except explanation. The determining factor in man's behavior when faced by fever, or thunder, or death is his conjecture on the causes of these things. All men are akin in spirit. That kinship is a part of the basis for the new native drama.

As a bit of proof for this idea, a number of rather romantic stories are told regarding the association of the Indians with some of the white settlers. The most intriguing of these stories is that of Pocohontas, the daughter of the famed Indian chief Powahatan, the one time inexorable enemy of the white man.

Pocohontas, as a child played with the young colonists. At one time, while visiting a certain chief named Japazaws, an Englishman named Argoll bribed him with a copper kettle to betray her into his hands. She was taken, his captive, to Jamestown. It was here that she met and married John Rolfe, a white man, following a Christian baptism. This marital union brought about a subsequent peace between Powhatan and the English settlers in Virginia.

A similar theme was treated by J. N. Barker in "The Indian Princess," however John Smith's rescue from death held the spotlight. It was Pocohontas who overheard Grimosco's dastardly plot to kill the Englishmen and arrived at the banquet in time to save them. The play deals solely with the friendship an enmity which existed among Indians and white men in Jamestown, Virginia.

Longfellow's "Hiawatha" is filled with fallacies, yet it is, indeed an embodiment of the realistic changes in the life of a people. It is nationalistic in scope, yet it is clothed in the folds of picturesqueness and sentimentality which catch the eye of the reader. It is a poem divided into eleven scenes, each representing a phase of progress in the hero's life.

Scene one, entitled "The Peace Pipe", centers about the organization of the Grand League. Gitchie Manito, Master of Life, called all his people to the Red Pipe-stone Rocks, and breaking a piece from the rock and kneading it in his hands, made it into a pipe. The smoking of the peace pipe was intended to banish forever from the world, stubbornness, thrist and fever, wars and bloodshed, vengeance and discord. This tradition yet persists among existing Indian tribes for it bears a specific significance.

In Scene II, to represent the changeability of the West Wind, he is presented as the faithless husband of Wenonah; and father of Hiawatha. In Scene III, Hiawatha, now a young man, went to visit Mudjekeewis, the West Wind, equipped with magic mittens which gave him strength to smite rocks asunder and magic moccasins of deerskin which allowed him to cover a mile at a time. Hiawatha resented his father having left his mother and sought this means of settling the debt. As Hiawatha and Mudjekeewis wrestled, storms smote the earth for the West Wind was ruthless in his strength.

Scene V, "Hiawatha's Fasting", is centered about Hiawatha's unselfish prayer for "the profit of the people and for advantage of the nations." He didn't wish them to be dependent upon fish alone. In answer to his prayer, Mandamin, corn, was sent to him. For three days Hiawatha fasted and wrestled with the youth until he finally became stronger and Mondamin weaker. Mondamin was then laid to rest beneath the earth after having given instructions beforehand that no worm or raven was to molest him.

Before summer the new crop was served to the nations. Thus corn was introduced to the world.

Scenes VI through XI magnify the great joy of friendship among Chibiabos, Kwasind and Hiawatha and the latter's extreme grief over the passing of his friends. Hiawatha's great, superhuman strength is exploited in the building of the birch canoe, his escape from the stomach of Mishe-Nahma, the sturgeon, his outwitting of Megisogwon, a magician who could be wounded only at the tuft of hair upon his head. The last two scenes are concerned with "Hiawatha's Wooing" and "Hiawatha's Wedding Feast," a suitable conclusion for such an exquisite treatment of a beautiful idea.

Judging from Longfellow's work, we are well able to say that though the Indian's fundamental ideas of democracy, agriculture, friendship, loyalty and war are swathed in sentimentalism, we can still find the note of realism and practicality present in them. They are the principles upon which present day opinions, statutes and activities are based in the world at large.

To the Indian we owe our ability to appreciate the world of Nature for he has personified it in his myths, legends, and traditions to the extent that we understand it and appreciate it. His simple beliefs are heart-touching, and it is this quality which makes him a good subject for folk drama as we understand it.

AFRICAN TRADITIONS AND MYTHOLOGY

Great controversies have arisen among investigators of Indian and African traditions and mythology. Some exploit the theory that there is a close kinship between the two.

For clarity, the term tradition is used to mean: "Whatever has been handed down by word of mouth, and was at one time conceived to be either a whole or a part truth. Myths and legends have been discussed synonomously with the word traditions and so will be discussed accordingly."[1]

Mr. Talley has found that Negro traditions are the result of evolution. Different strange happenings took place among the pre-war American Negroes. In an attempt to explain such happenings, they gave birth to a number of interesting stories which later became known as traditions.

Joel Chandler Harris attempted to find Negro traditions and folklore by listening to stories told him by the Southern Negro. He did not get all their traditions, because some of the Negroes considered the stories only half traditional and half fiction. Their real stories of tradition were probably never told as a source of pure amusement.

A few Negro traditions might be discovered through such stories as "How the Bear Lost His Judgeship," "Why the Buzzard is Black," "The Devil's Daughters," and "Cottoneyed Joe." All of these stories, though outwardly abounding in nonsense, have biological and scientific bases.

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1. Thomas W. Talley, "The Origin of Negro Traditions" Phylon (4th Quarter 1942) pp 371-376

The Negro considered that he saw something very mysterious in nature. He sought to tell others about what he had observed, in the meantime weaving in his own experiences, and magnifying them to great proportions. The stories went from person to person becoming a bit changed at each narration. Thus began a new tradition.

There is little worthwhile material to be found regarding African elements among American Negroes because they have never been thoroughly studied. Some surface investigators have stated that the African retained nothing of pure African traits but his temperament. This statement has gone unexplained. What is temperament but an element of culture? It is a basis for passion and folk drama is based almost solely upon passion.

The law abiding Negro citizen is an exponent of an African tradition for the original Africans as members of tribes had regard for law. The industrial skill of the Negro is a carry-over of native African industrial art. The seeming natural leaning of the Negro toward the stage has also been attributed to his African background.

It is the opinion of Professor J. W. Powell of the Smithsonian Institution, who is engaged in a study of the folklore of the North American Indians, that some of Uncle Remus's stories are found in different forms among the Indians, and advances the theory that the Negroes borrowed them from the red men. This theory is clothed in doubt because still another investigation has found some of the same stories among tribes of South American Indians. It is a supposition then, that the common origin of the stories was in Africa.

These traditions, myths and characteristics, despite the arguments regarding their origin, are used as a basis in several little theatre plays.

NATIONALISTIC NOTE IN AMERICAN PLAYS

AMERICAN TYPE FIGURES

KIT CARSON

Kit Carson joins the ranks of the revered men who were immortalized through the shroud of mythology. Kit Carson to his friends was born Christopher Carson in Madison County, Kentucky. His careet as an American hunter, trapper and Western Scout, began in 1826 when he accompanied a party of hunters to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Various were his accomplishments but his feat of driving 6500 sheep to California; the driving of 50 horses and mules unaided to Fort Laramie, were often praised. In 1854 he was appointed Indian agent for the Apaches and Utahs, at Taos, New Mexico. Because he was so influential with the Indians, he was of great service to the United States government. He served it ably in the Civil War, and later, against the Navajo Indians.

DAVY CROCKETT, FRONTIERSMAN

In the early days of our country when all the land west of the Alleghenies was a great wilderness, young David Crockett grew up in Tennessee. With "Old Betsy" as he called his rifle, he tramped the woods hunting game with his dog at his heels.

He told all kinds of fantastic tales about his activities. One never knew what degree of truth lay in them. As an example, this story was told about him.

The hunters said that all the raccoons knew Davy Crockett. One day as he prepared to shoot one, he heard a voice asking, "Are you Davy Crockett?" Davy answered in the affirmative. "Then don't shoot, I'll come right down. I know I'm a gone coon".

The expression "barking up the wrong tree" originated with Davy Crockett. He was following his hounds one day. Each time they began barking he would rush up to the tree where they were, but found no game. This happened more than twice. Crockett said, "I found they were barking up the wrong tree again." Eventually they did lead him to a bear and then Davy said, "I felt well satisfied that a dog may be doing a good business even when he seems to be barking up the wrong tree."

Davy Crockett was prominent not only as a frontiersman, but as a Congressman. The people of Tennessee considered him a very reliable individual. They sent him to Washington. Enroute he met a person at an inn who inquired about his identity.

"I'm Davy Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half horse, half alligator, a little touched with snappin' turtle. I can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride a streak of lightning, hug a bear too close for comfort and eat any man opposed to Andrew Jackson."

Davy Crockett won a great amount of admiration in Washington. He won the name "Coonskin Congressman" because he wore his hunting regalia when he arrived in Washington. He was outspoken, callous to the advice of his elders and charmingly illiterate as far as some terms or expressions were concerned which he encountered as Congressman.

He didn't have a good opinion of the congressional debates. He felt that a lot was said about nothing and that several of the members of Congress were paid their salaries only for listening to what the others had to say. It was Davy Crockett's idea that they earned every cent of it considering some of the speeches.

In 1836 the Texans were fighting to gain their independence from Mexico. Davy wanted to lend a helping hand, and so armed with his rifle and his motto: "Be sure you are right, then go ahead", he joined a band of Americans who were using the Alamo, an old mission, as a fort. For eleven days they held it, but an attack was launched which cost the lives of all the Texans.

On the basis of this incident, John Milhous wrote, "Davy Crockett", a moving play centered about the life of this daring and pardonably egotistic character.

PART III

AMERICAN BALLADRY AS SOURCE OF PLOTS

WASHINGTON PLAYS

WASHINGTON AT VALLEY FORGE

The great men who figured in the early history of our history of our country have been ensconced in romanticism and protrayed to Americans as the human beings that they were. At the same time important historical events are imprinted more indelibly upon the hearts and minds of audiences and readers.

Foremost among this type of play is "Washington At Valley Forge" by Esther Willard Bates.

From our history texts we read of the extreme privation of General Washington and his armies. We read that his men were loyal despite their privation; that Washington was kind to the men who were under his command. The bare statement of facts never made the reader actually appreciate the depth of Washington's soul, the depth of his soldiers' souls; the hardships and discouragements suffered by all. Miss Bates has in her play supplied that human element found lacking in texts. She has painted the picture so vividly that one lives with Washington and his men; feels their pulses beat, suffers pain and cold when they suffer; feels their hunger as they felt it and sings Washington's praises over and over again.

In "Washington At Valley Forge", Washington's men are in an extremely deplorable condition. They are starved and poorly clothed. Their rifles are rusted and the ammunition is spoiled because of the extreme cold and the terrific snows. The spirit of loyalty is illustrated by the woman who forgot that her own life was in danger and set out to carry food to the soldiers because they expected her. Another illustration lies in the attempt of one man to crawl through enemy territory to secure food for his starved soldiers trapped beyond Washington's quarters. He is wounded enroute. In the interim two of Washington's men deserted, causing the guard a bit of discomfiture, because they felt they could no longer stand the conditions existing in camp. They came in contact with this loyal soldier seeking food for his men, and realizing how foolish they were, returned to camp and gave themselves up. Washington was stern; he was an exponent of strict discipline, but these qualities could not erase his kindness of heart. He went to the two deserters, talked with them that he might determine the causes for their act. In lieu of meting out the extreme penalty for such a crime, he pardoned the men. They were undeniably grateful to him and vowed never to violate the army laws again.

Miss Bates presented Count Pulaski, who joined Washington's men, as a representative of foreign powers, which for the mutual love of freedom, joined forces with the Continental Army.

In this play there ie ever evident the warmth, the glow of human kindness, loyalty, desire for freedom that has permeated the hearts and minds of men since the beginning of the world.

'TWIXT CUP AND LIP

Ellen Garrigues and Pauline Hopkins wrote "'Twixt Cup and Lip" for the United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission which gives a different view of Washington's Co-workers from the picture painted in "George Washington At Valley Forge". In it we are confronted by a plot devised among George Washington's body guard against his life and those of his close advisers. Thomas Hickey, one member of the body guard, was designated to carry out the plot. It was he who was very close to Washington, therefore he was given free movement throughout the house. He planned to poison the punch which was to be served during the evening. Washington and his advisers were to drink first. Through Phoebe, the housekeeper's loyalty to Washington and her keen wittedness, his plot was foiled as far as Washington's death was concerned, but numerous and dangerous fires were begun in New York City. As a result, the war flared forth.

We saw Washington as a keen strategist and one who gives a man the benefit of the doubt until he learns differently concerning him. He had implicit faith in Hickey until his plot unfolded. Hickey took advantage of the fact that Washington was a great lover of "punch" therefore he sought that avenue by which to poison him.

THE EVACUATION OF BOSTON

"The Evacuation of Boston" is a delightful play by Esther Willard Bates in which the author has given local color to that historical event.

Prudence Lechmere proves her patriotism by appearing at the home of a friend in ordinary homespun clothing when a reception was just about to take place. She horrified her hostess whereupon she explained that to be loyal to Washington's cause she could not afford to accept of luxuries in English food and dress. As a result she found herself the object of the sneers and satirical remarks of the select English society.

There was Lieutenant Chisholm, however, of the English army who was not in accord with the attitude of his fellow countrymen toward Prudence. He was in love with her, but she refused his suit until he resigned his commission with the English army. Chisholm makes arrangements to do as Prudence requests after much persuasion.

Washington's forces were successful in routing the English soldiers from the city, and as he marched through the city leading his men, he was greeted by the loud cheers of watchers from sidewalks and homes. There was great rejoicing in Prudence's heart because of Washington's victory. In the meantime, Prudence's sneering Tory friends had changed to the Sons of Liberty and the Daughters of Liberty". They called to Washington as he passed and invited him in. He entered the home to find that Chisholm had resigned his place in the English army and was requesting Washington to accept him as a member of the American army. Washington acquiesced and of course, there was not a happier girl than was Prudence Lechmere.

Here, again, we see Washington the dignified, the kind, the patient man that he was.

THE MOTHER OF WASHINGTON

Leroy Phillips has portrayed a marvelous character in Mary Ball Washington, the Mother of George Washington. She was quite happy because her son was expected home on a visit after more glories had been bestowed upon him. The great Fredericksburg Peace Ball held in 1781 was being given in his honor. Mary Ball Washington was invited to attend, and though she was seventy-four years of age, she accepted. Upon her august son's request, she wore her dress of black brocade. She made a very quiet and dignified entrance on the arm of her son, the hero of the day.

Her effect upon the French and American officers present was evidenced in Lafayette's words: "If such are the mothers of America, it is not wonder that their sons are illustrious."[1]

LINCOLN PLAYS
THE SHADOW OF A GREAT MAN

"The Shadow of a Great Man" by Esther Willard Bates is the story of the practice of abolition in Illinois.

Mr. and Mrs. Davis, prominent citizens in their community during Lincoln's presidency, sympathized deeply with the slaves and formed a substantial and dependable segment of the "underground railroad". They and their son were suspected of being

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1. Leroy Phillips, The Mother of Washington, pp 1 - 25.

sympathizers and were subsequently watched by their adversaries. Mr. Dwight threatened them with discharges from their position held at the bank. Upon suspecting that one group of slaves was to be sent out that particular night, men were sent to spy upon the Davis family. There were slaves in the house. While the men were pounding impatiently upon the door, Mr. Davis sent the slaves from the house to a hiding place and then calmly put away his glasses. He requested his wife to read the Bible to him that he might better create the idea that the glasses were lost.

When the men were admitted, they had papers for Davis to read, but of course he couldn't do so because he didn't have his glasses. Aside from that he wouldn't stop his service to let them read to him. In the meantime, they searched the house for missing slaves, but found none. As a result they left and Mr. Davis resumed his activities. He even won Mr. Dwight over as an abolitionist. Of course the latter didn't wish to admit that he did sympathize with Mr. Davis, but he did give money to defray expenses.

While this action was taking place, Abraham Lincoln was fighting for the abolition of the degrading institution - slavery. So great was he, so well liked, that Mr. Davis' son said of him, "He'd lose his living, he'd give up his chance, and he'd keep on helping every poor, suffering, beated, frightened slave that came to his door."[1]

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1. Esther Williard Bates, The Shadow of a Great Man, pp 1 - 36

In the shadow of his spirit, men sought to free the world of slavery.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN - JOHN DRINKWATER

John Drinkwater has represented the historical background of Lincoln's presidency in a most dramatic manner and his portrayal of Mary Todd Lincoln is impeccable.

The play opens in the parlour of Abraham Lincoln's home at Springfield, Illinois in 1860. Mr. Stone and Mr. Cuffee are calling upon Mr. Lincoln to request that he run for the office of president of the United States. He is slow to give an answer and apologizes for his reluctance with these words: "I wouldn't have you think it graceless of me to be slow in my answer. But once given, it's for the deep good or the deep ill of all this country".

Mary Todd Lincoln was just the type of woman to fire her husband's indolent ambition. She was,however,making it difficult for Lincoln at times when she was tactless and rigid in her ideas and customs. In her own words Mrs. Lincoln characterizes herself: "I'm likely to go into history now with a great man. For I know better than any how great he is. I'm plain looking and I've a sharp tongue, and I've a mind that doesn't always go in his easy high way. And that's what history will see, and it will laugh a little, and say, Poor Abraham Lincoln. That's all right, but it's not all. I've always known when he should go forward and when he should hold back. I've watched

and watched, and what I've learnt America will profit by. There are women like that, lots of them. But I'm lucky. My work's going farther than Illinois - it's going farther than any of us can tell. I made things easy for him to think and think when we were poor, and now his thinking has brought him this. They wanted to make him Governor of Oregon, and he would have gone and have come to nothing there. I stopped him. Now they're coming to ask him to be President and I've told him to go."

She had the pleasure of seeing her husband become president. She watched over him constantly, so much so that he grew weary of her close attention at times.

Like the present administration, Lincoln liked being in close contact with his people. He enjoyed hearing their views upon the various problems which continued to arise, therefore he received them graciously in the reception room at the White House regardless of their station in life.

During the Civil War, he visited General Grant's quarters in an old farmhouse near Appomattox where he slept upon the rough beds such as those used by soldiers. His purpose was to ascertain conditions which existed among his fighting men. In the meantime, he stayed one man's death at the hands of a firing squad. He had fallen asleep on duty - duty for a friend as well as his own. Here again we witness Lincoln's extreme sympathy and kindness of heart. The young man was sent on duty with his regiment, but the irony of it all - he was killed in action.

Of Lincoln, Macintosh said, "Abraham Lincoln sees deeper into men's hearts than most". [1]

On April 14, 1865, Mrs. Lincoln urged her husband to attend the Ford Theatre for the evening's entertainment. The necessary arrangements made, the Lincolns proceeded to the theatre and seated themselves in their box. During the performance, an assassin took the life of Abraham Lincoln.

With these fitting words the second Chronicler closes the plays: "But as we spoke, presiding everywhere upon event was one man's character. And that endures; it is the token sent always to man for man's own government".[2]

Each man who has written of Lincoln finally brings out his most prominent characteristics. He was depicted as a progmatist and a philosopher. He was unassuming with all men. Billy Herndon said of him, "A man who has never wanted anything in his life but to be let alone in peace".[3]

During his presidency, his cabinet members' attitude toward slavery was expressed by Jennings when he said, "Disabuse his mind. Slavery is nothing. Persuade him to withdraw from Fort Sumter, and slavery can be settled round a table. You know there's a considerable support even for abolition in the South itself. If the trade has to be allowed in some districts, what is that compared to the disaster of civil war?"[4]

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1. John Drinkwater, Abraham Lincoln, p. 23
2. Ibid, p. 110
3. Robert Sherwood, Abe Lincoln in Illinois, pp. 31 - 74
4. John Drinkwater, op. Cit. p. 97.

Lincoln did not agree. He did not condone war but he wanted no part of slavery. He could not accomplish his aim regarding slavery without war therefore he refused to withdraw his men from Fort Sumter.

He was accused of being an exponent of atheism, because he never attended a church. He nevertheless was a Christian and believed in the type of Christianity that followed the "Savior's own statement of law and gospel." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself". No man can say other than that he did live just such a life.

ABE LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS

Robert Sherwood's "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" is considered to be immortal because it is a natural legen carrying some idea of the American dream; the great theses of human wit with Lincoln as spokesman.

From Sherwood's play we are haunted by Lincoln's sober wit, his grave broodings over "The Family of Man on the earth and the strange prices of devotion and discipline paid for the getting and keeping of freedom".[1]

Lincoln's struggle for an education, his willingness to be one of the people in his community, his love, his disappointments, his bereavement were all woven artfully together giving

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1. Robert Sherwood, Abe Lincoln in Illinois, pp 31 - 74
   Mantle, Burns, Best Plays in 1938-39

us the life pattern of the democratic spirit with its rather timid policy of "live and let live".

Before attempting anything, Lincoln first had to believe he was right and that truth and justice were on his side or he was a weak man, but no man was stronger if he thought he was right.

PART IV

OTHER HISTORICAL PLAYS

THE INDIAN PRINCESS

As an example of the use of the Indian character in Little Theatre plays we shall tell J. N. Barker's story of Pocahontas, inspired by John Smith and Rolfe in John Smith's own story in the General History of Virginia.

Pocahontas and her brother Nantaquas make ardent pleas to Powhatan who is about to have Smith's head chopped off on the testimony of his braves that Smith had killed six braves.

The brother and sister finally convince their father that John Smith is really a friend and not a foe where upon he is released.

Miami, a Susquehannock, wanting Pocahontas for his bride, becomes jealous of John Smith because Pocahontas exhibits a sisterly love for him. Susquehannock is quite jealous of John Rolfe because Pocahontas has fallen in love with him.

A scheme is worked out by Grimosco, a priest with evil ways, and presented to Miami whereby the Englishmen are to be killed at a banquet. They succeed in convincing Powhatan of the faithlessness of the Englishmen, and he agrees, hesitatingly however, with their plan. Pocahontas overheard the plan and arrived at the banquet in time to avert the tragedy. Miami upon being accused, kills himself.

A previous refusal by the Indian princess to marry Miami has resulted in tribal war.

The play is centered solely around the friendship and enmity which existed between Indians and white men at Jamestown, Virginia.

John Smith has a great habit of fabricating at times. This story may or may not have been true, nevertheless it formed an interesting background for a charming little play.

WHAT PRICE GLORY

This play was written by Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings, to paint rather frankly the life of the soldier in France in World War I. The expletives used are not used to stress profanity, but merely to show that the soldier used such words to stress his point more or less. (They drank heavily to help keep their spirits together.)

There was no plot of great worth, but the authors fulfilled their purpose in that they made Americans see the death struggle of our boys "over there" as they could never have seen it in ordinary literature.

Captain Flagg and Sergeant Quirt engage in an amusing bit of rivalry for Charmaine, a French girl. Flagg attempts to have Quirt marry her when her father states that she has been wronged by one of the two men. Plans were made for the wedding, but sudden orders to move were issued and Quirt took advantage of the same and left without a wife.

Beneath this lighter vein, we see all the sorrow of reconnaissance trips, the terror of delivering food to men trapped beyond the lines, the living inferno of dreadful injuries, the makeshift hospitals to care for the injured, the filth and squalor in which the men had to sleep, when they could sleep. With all these reverses, there was a certain amount of bravado kept up by the Captain because he realized the morale of his soldiers depended upon his reaction to the situations. What Price Glory?

Orders finally came to return to their original quarters. The remaining part of the company was happy to return, but no sooner had they settled than a new order came to move. Despite all their previous hardships, they lost no time in preparing for the next move.

The same morale exists among our fighting men in this war.

SUMMARY

Kit Carson and Davy Crockett, because of their prowess and their love of nature were immortalized through the medium of mythology and hence have become nationalistic figures in American legends. Despite their legendary build-up there are sufficient facts to establish their identity as being actual human beings. They added a touch of realism to early American drama because of their great love of nature, their constant fight to save the ideals of a developing nation in which they

believed. They believed in being fair and outspoken in all their dealings, for too much time was wasted by some in doing and saying unnecessary things.

George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, two great American statesmen revered in history, have become immortal in the hearts of our people because each stood for a principle and each fought to realize it.

Washington, through patience, perseverance and loyalty strove to help his country develop into the nation it has become. Though he was in a very responsible position, he had time to enjoy the small pleasures of life and to study and enjoy the soil. He had no objection to a bit of "punch" occasionally, and he maintained a plantation so that he might be close to nature when he sought solace and solitude.

In Abraham Lincoln we see a man born a commoner who became great, but never forgot the people with whom he first associated. His subsequent greatness never destroyed his sympathy, his kindness, and the solidarity which became a part of him as a young man in Illinois. His attitude toward slavery, whether from a personal or a political point of view, was born of an innate desire to be kind, to help unfortunate beings. He never forgot the hard, rough road he had had to travel to reach his position. He was a realist at heart. Greatness failed to destroy it. Superficiality was, in his estimation, a curse. This reason accounted for his extreme popularity with the majorities.

For the reasons set forth, historical drama based upon the lives of men such as Washington, Lincoln, Crockett and Carson, would naturally appeal to the "people" for they could see in these men, persons like themselves. This, then,was a suitable foundation for a Little Theatre following.

"What Price Glory" is a pure example of realism or the "support of nature" idea. The men of whom we spoke in the play, were shown no mercy in battle and showed none in return. They lived, in some instances, no better than swine, but they were fighting for a cause and their sense of loyalty would not let them quit. The sordidness of the situation, starvation, injuries failed to daunt them. They saw one of their number go mad, but still they carried on for their country. The "people" liked that sort of play because it showed a cross-current of society united with a common bond --- freedom and democracy.

PART V

FOLKLORE IN LITTLE THEATRE PLAYS

Having found that the folk of the mountains and of the deep South can supply rich folklore, numerous playwrights are portraying them on the Little Theatre stage and they are being accepted.

There is a certain amount of sorrow, a certain amount of comedy, a good homespun philosophy in these plays. We find however, a definite lack of morals. The morale is low to a certain extent, nevertheless the "down-to-earthness" of all of them intrigue the audience. They are rich in superstition.

From the Blue Ridge Mountains we have the "Funeral Flowers for the Bride" by Beverly DuBose Homer. In this play use is made of the survival of the ancient wake.

The mountaineer very often marries from two to five times because he needs a wife to help with the flocks, the cabin, the children and the stock. He is not always conventional about the lapse of time between wives. Zeke's wife was deceased. Ruby, his daughter, disapproves of her father remarrying for a third time and his second wife is a corpse in the room. He argues that Mary, (the wife) would want him to do so. In time, Sadie Johnson, a friend, enters the home to attend the wake. Zeke very unromantically proposes to her. She hesitates because his wife had not been buried, but with due persuasion she accepts him. The minister and Ruby are summoned, and at the point

of a rifle held in Zeke's hand, the ceremony is about to be performed when he snatches the flowers from his wife's coffin for his bride to use as a bouquet.

PLAYS OF THE KENTUCKY MOUNTAINS

Percy Mackaye saw in the isolated Appalachian mountains a wealth of unexplored material. He realized that in the ancient civilization of these mountain folk he might find a bit of tragedy and a bit of comedy as they helplessly gave over their folk inheritance to the modern mode of life.

He wrote of these people as he saw them for he traveled upon foot and mule back to live among them.

Mackaye wishes his audience to realize that there exists a sharp differentiation between the energetic ridge folk of Kentucky and the Appalachian fold living from there farther south. Their rich traditional learning and their illiteracy have formed an interesting nucleus for literature.

The first of this group of plays is "Napoleon Crossing the Rockies."

Lark and Tildy Fiddler lived together in a little tumble down cabin in the Kentucky mountains. In their illiteracy they were easy victims for Hodge and Steptoe, questionable types of business men.

Lark loved his guitar and there was one particular tune he played entitled "Napoleon Crossing the Rockies." Whenever he was happy he resorted to singing it.

It so happened that Lark's cabin stood upon a stretch of land which Hodge and Steptoe wanted because they saw that it was valuable. They did not wish to carry out an honest transaction; therefore, Steptoe took supreme advantage of his friendship with the old couple and put the deal over.

We get a fairly good idea of the situation or their intentions as Hodge says upon approaching the cabin, "This makes the third trip I've tramped these God forsook creeks fishin' for suckers".[1]

Hodge first tried to keep the land by enticing the elderly couple with a bag of bright new pennies. They would have thought it a huge sum of money. The men were disappointed however, when the old people turned down the offer because of the spring on their property. Steptoe, telling Hodge to subside, undertook selling the proposition. He knew Tildy wanted more than anything in the world a pair of "pieded beads". Lark wanted a set of strings for his guitar. Promising them that they would never have to move from their land as Hodge had suggested, if they just signed an X at the specified place, Steptoe managed to acquire the land and all he gave for it were the beads to Tildy and the guitar strings to Lark.

He had taken advantage of the old people's illiteracy, their childlike craving for trifles and their religion, for they believed that God had a hand in their acquiring such wonderful articles.

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1. Percy Mackaye, Kentucky Mountain Fantasies, p. 4

THE FUNERALIZING OF CRICKNECK

Crickneck Hen was dead, so Widder Coots thought, and she was duly mourning her husband's death. She sat in a mournful attitude while Samp Green preached a long drawn out sermon about the deceased punctuated by a few sips of water. During this "funeralizing" ceremony a stranger slipped in. Seeing food on the table and later the bottle of whiskey which Widder Coots took from Samp Green's pocket, he began to edge noiselessly toward the table.

The service was ended. Widder Coots forthwith began to propose to the venerable old preacher. He remembered that the Widder Coots had a rather substantial sum of money tucked away some place. He suggested that he would consider her proposal if she would give him the money. She gave him only one half of it, but proceeded to tell him all about where and how the remaining half was hidden.

The stranger's ears were very alert and he found that the money was sewn in the "Tree of Life" pattern on the bed coverlet. He straightway crawled stealthily over to the bed, squatted down beside it and began to change his convict's clothes for others beneath the cover. In the meantime he was unravelling the quilt that he might find the money.

When she discovered that there was something moving beneath the cover, Widder Coots thought only of a "hant". She knew that Crickneck had children by his first wife who should have shared the money. All this heightened her fear. She asked Samp Green to pray because his prayers were so powerful.

In the meantime the sheriff came looking for Crickneck who had escaped from jail. Even then the Widder didn't realize that it was he beneath the cover. She sent the man away saying that Hen wasn't there.

Crickneck finally made his appearance and his "widder" began to talk with him. He approved of the "funeralizing", drank the whiskey, ate and left giving his blessing to the two he left behind.

Widder Coots thought that Samp could marry himself to her since he was a preacher but Samp told her differently. Such illiteracy was common among these people.

TIMBER

All of Nancy's sons, except Timber, and her husband who were all lumberjacks, had been killed by falling timber. One evening Timber failed to return to his home and the entire family was frantic with fear. Nancy gives the basis for the story in her words, "And the onliest left, he's my son! Named him Timber I did for to take the old spell off. I sended for the charm doctor the day he was borned. He tuck the sprig of a witch hazel what he cut him in the dark o' the moon, and he jist tetched the babe with that there sprig three times - skelp, loins and heel - and he christened him Timber thar in the Three Highest Names".

From Nancy's words we realize the perfect unparalleled faith which some mountain folk had in charms and what not.

It so happened that Timber returned to his home thus increasing his mother's faith in the charm.

While his wife, Marget, was preparing his dinner, he found the jug of whiskey and drank until he became inebriated. He immediately left home driving a car and met his death at the steering wheel.

Marget vowed that she would also have her son, when he was born, christened as was Timber, "in the dark o' the moon, thar in the Three Highest Names".[1]

We marvel at these people's extreme illiteracy, superstitious beliefs, and religious fanaticism, and yet we have to admit the charm of such literature. Mackaye had captured a superb aesthetic quality in his Fantasies which cannot be surpassed. All because he first bore a sympathetic attitude for these folk of the mountains.

PLAY FROM BACKWOODS OF TENNESSEE

DAVY CROCKETT - JOHN PHILIP MILHOUSE

This story comes from the backwoods tavern of West Tennessee telling of the adventurer who endeared himself to a group of frontiersmen by his show of brute strength. He was a braggart as well as a politician and a soldier.

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1. Percy Mackaye, Kentucky Mountain Fantasies, p. 113

Scene I of the play pictures Davy the center of attention with his jubilant spirit running rampage. Scene II is a decided change for he is the forlorn soldier on his way to war knowing he has no chance, but still willing to fight until the end.

It is said he was the martyr of the Alamo, for his body was found torn and hacked to pieces in one corner of the old fortress after he and his men were brutally murdered by 2,500 trained soldiers of the Mexican army.

"Davy Crockett - Davy - Crockett! The yellow flower of the forest, shattered crimson in the desert air".[1]

This little play combines the historical with the charm of folklore and thus does justice to Milhouse. He followed closely the story of Davy Crockett and wove in the spirit of hero worship.

NANCY HANKS, BOND WOMAN

Janie Mallory Britt of North Carolina, wrote an amazing little play regarding Abraham Lincoln's little discussed parenthood and treated it with such alluring quality that the story is actually beautiful.

For more than a hundred years now the tradition has persisted that Abraham Lincoln was the son of Nancy Hanks and

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1. John Phillip Milhouse, "Davy Crockett" in American Folk Plays, Frederick Koch, Editor - 1939, p. 212

Abraham Enloe of the settlement of Ocona Lufta in the mountains of western North Carolina.

Abraham and Sarah Enloe were married and living in their native county of Rutherford. There they adopted a child, Nancy Hanks, one of the large family of Bill Hanks, a cobler who was always drunk. The mother was forced to allow two of her daughters to work. Nancy went to the Enloes.

The Enloe family migrated to Buncombe county in the Great Smokey Mountains, and there became so prosperous that Abraham bought lands in Kentucky where he set up a grist-mill and hired Tom Lincoln as a miller.

Nancy grew into a comely girl both in form and features and was admired by all. Mrs. Enloe had grown to be an ailing, nagging wife. As a result, Abraham Enloe turned to Nancy for companionship. What was first a strong admiration, soon turned into enduring love.

When Sarah discovered that the girl was "in a state of increase", she ordered her out of the home. It was then that Abraham gave Tom Lincoln one hundred dollars and a mule to take Nancy as his wife.

At first she was reluctant to go, but later realized the futility of staying. Her words, as she left the Enloe home, bore the marks of a prophecy: "And God said unto Abraham, let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bond woman; in all Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also

of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation because he is thy seed".[1]

Nancy's prophecy was fulfilled. Abraham Lincoln was a great man; he is immortal!

FOLKLORE OF THE NEGRO

The Negro has been the nucleus for a number of plays dealing with his traditions, his folksongs, his superstitions and religious fanaticisms. However the majority of playwrights of these plays are white, and with all due respect to their fineness of literary art, their apparent sincerity, they have been unable to catch the true spirit of the Negro and weave it satisfactorily into their themes.

The Negro is practically always depicted as a criminal of some type, as an extremely illiterate individual, as a conjurer, or as a crawling, sniveling fugitive from a white man's lash. Has one ever taken into consideration that all these things have happened in the lives of some types of Negroes and that the treatment received at the hands of the white was to blame for it all?

Nevertheless, we have a few interesting plays regarding the Negro upon the Little Theatre stage among which are Eugene O'Neil's "Emperor Jones", Marc Connelly's "Green Pastures",

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1. Janie Mallery Britt, "Nancy Hanks, Bondwoman", American Folk Plays, Frederick Koch, 1939, p. 412.

Paul Green's and Richard Wright's "Native Son", Ridgeley Torrence's Three Plays for a Negro Theatre", and Randolph Edmond's "Nat Turner's Rebellion".

Richard Wright is the author of "Native Son" and he collaborated with Paul Green in reverting it into drama form. Randolph Edmonds is a Negro dramatist of repute who has a different type of story in his play.

THREE PLAYS FOR A NEGRO THEATRE

From Ridgeley Torrences' "Three Plays For a Negro Theatre" we will consider "Granny Maumee". This is the story of an aged Negro woman who is blind and whose face is severely burned from the flames of the fire in which her son was burned by a vicious white mob.

As the play opens, she is preparing for her great-granddaughter and her son. Of course she supposes that the girl is married. When Sapphie comes, it is discovered that she has no husband and the child is that of a white man, Granny Maumee is not told of this for she has a horror of her blood ever being mixed with white blood, consequently Sapphie fears her great-grandmother's fury.

Granny entreats God to let her see the great-great-grandson - a man child to replace her murdered son. Her prayers are answered. She beholds the white babe and immediately lashes herself into a fury whereupon she sets about conjuring her grand-daughters to aid her in casting a curse upon Lightfoot, Sapphie's child's father.

During her incantations, however, Granny Maumee sees her son who admonishes her not to harm anyone - to let Lightfoot go - not to spill blood because his was spilled. The exertion of "conjuring" and its revelations leave Granny weak and she falls dead. This play is influenced by the old African rituals.

RIDER OF DREAMS

"The Rider of Dreams", another of Torrence's plays is the story of Madison and Lucy Sparrow. Madison was a day dreamer and loved to play a guitar while Lucy washed to support the family of three and saved to buy a little home. Her husband, unfortunately, falls into the evil company of Wilson Byrd, a questionable white man who steals a very valuable guitar from Uncle Williams and gives it to Madison. Byrd also forges Lucy's name on a check and gets Madison to draw out all of his wife's earnings.

Madison was in turn robbed of the money. A peculiar turn of circumstances reveals the fact that Uncle Williams had seen Byrd steal his guitar, had followed him, and taken the money from Madison for safe keeping. (It was from Williams that Lucy was purchasing the home.)

Williams after frightening both Lucy and Madison over the consequences, has Lucy to write her check for the money he already has as a legal payment for the house. He then gives the priceless guitar to Madison with the understanding that he will teach and write music as a means of supporting his wife. If he fails to do this, the guitar will be taken back.

Madison, under these conditions could work and at the same time ride his dream again.

GREEN PASTURES

The "Green Pastures" is fantasy, but it is likewise simple, profound reality, (from Sterling Brown's Negro Poetry and Drama)[1]. It has also been called "an attempt to present certain aspects of a living religion in the terms of its believers".[2]

It is the story of the Creation, the development of man upon earth and his relationship with God as seen and interpreted by Mr. Deshee the Negro minister. Marc Connelly painted the picture as he imagined the untutored, and unlettered Negroes of the deep South saw heaven and God.

The play received favorable and unfavorable comments from both races. Personally I admire Marc Connelly's imagination. It is superb, but I feel that the production is too fantastic a fantasy to be appreciated in full.

EMPEROR JONES

The drama, "Emperor Jones", is a story of a poorly educated and superstitious Pullman porter whose rapid ascent to influence and power is very quickly followed by a sudden descent

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1. Edith J. R. Isaacs (Narrator), "The Negro in the American Theatre", xxvi 8, August, 1942, p. 512.

2. Ibid., p. 512.

from power and sudden death. The source of conflict in the play is Jones' ambition and is the nucleus around which the story is woven.

Jones is far from his native Southland because he is being sought by the law for the murder of a man in a card game. Escaping to the islands, he there establishes himself as Emperor, has the natives believing he is God and that only a silver bullet will kill him.

Smithers, who has befriended Jones, is sorrowing over the fact that the latter has this strong influence over the natives. In the course of events, the self-styled Emperor is deserted by his men and finds himself alone in the forest where he beseeches God to forgive him for all his sins. He is followed by Smithers and an old African Negro, Leon. Smithers is anxious for Jones' demise so allows the soldiers to make a silver bullet which kills him.

Again we see superstition paramount in Negro drama as well as the ever portrayed fear.

PART VI

CANADIAN INFLUENCE

STILL STANDS THE HOUSE - GWENDOLYN PHARRIS

The lure of the American soil, was felt by a Canadian girl, and she wrote a rather stark tragedy painted for us in an undeniably artistic manner of the sun-parched prairies of Western America - a region once known as the "bread basket of the world" - in recent years a desert plain.

Hester's fanatic devotion to the old homestead and to her deceased father makes her relentless in her torture of her brother's wife. Despite the barrenness of the land, she does not consent for her brother to sell the homestead.

Ruth, Hester's sister-in-law, fails to fill the lanterns one night, when her husband goes out to care for a foaling mare. When she realized it, she asks Hester to fill the lantern so that she can take it out to find her husband. If she doesn't he will perish in the blizzard.

Unknown to Ruth, Hester does not fill the lantern, consequently Ruth rushes out with the partially filled lantern, the light of which will not last for the return trip to the house. Their fate is told in Hester's closing speech: "The snow lies deep on the summer fallow ... The snow is a moving shroud ... a winding sheet that the wind lifts and raises and lets fall again. They've gone! They won't be back now!"[1]

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1. Pharris, Gwendolyn, "Still Stands the House", Canadian Plays From Hart House Theatre, p. 89.

SUMMARY

Percy MacKaye's interest in the Kentucky Mountain folk has presented to the Little Theatre public a so-called "Untamed America". His presentation, however, is given through the eyes of the poet who sees the beauty in everything and who fails to shun squalor. Lonely surroundings or backgrounds hold a song for him. He sees a bond of brotherhood existant between the Untamed and the Tamed. He sees something more in the meagre civilization of the mountains than he does in a machine-made world. He is of the opinion that if we can offer the mountaineer a new civilization, he can offer us an ancient one. It is this spirit of mutual exchange which characterizes MacKaye's approach to all his work.

Lark and Tildy Fiddler, in their ancient mountain civilization had eyes only for "pieded" beads, the strings for a guitar and the spring. They constituted their life, so when Hodge stepped in and eventually offered them the beads and the strings for the guitar, they let their property go. That was their most precious possession, but they didn't realize it. The folk-touch lay in their childish craving for trifles, their ignorance and their implicit faith in a representative from the outside world. Here we see the spirit of reciprocity between the two types of civilizations.

"The Funeralizing of Crickneck", "Timber" and "Granny Maumee" are plays based solely upon the folk ideas of "hants", charms, incantations and conjuration. The mountaineers and the less educated Southern Negro, in some instances, thrive upon

that sort of thing. The religious fanaticism, the superstitious beliefs, the extreme interest in trifles, give a touch of the sentimental to these plays. They depict the mental attitude of the people and thus are of interest to the outside, or modern world.

"Davy Crockett", "Nancy Hanks, Bond-Woman" and "Rider of Dreams" are more purely realistic and "down-to-the-earth" in nature, nevertheless there is the romantic touch in them also in a form of adventure. "Emperor Jones" is a combination of the romantic, the sentimental, and the realistic. Jones' flight because of a murder is stark realism, but his posing as emperor brought in the romantic touch and this sentimental touch was exemplified through the idea he fostered regarding the silver bullet as the only means of death for him.

"Still Stands the House", is a sentimental folk tragedy based upon one woman's devotion to the land which enslaved her and caused her to commit indirect murder.

In each of these plays, man's eternal conflict with the forces without is evident. It is this conflict which makes life bearable or unbearable and it is this conflict which is the foundation for Little Theatre plays.

The demands of the people are to see each character in his natural habitat; to see him in his natural mental attitude; to see his beliefs and to live with him in the audience; to be transported from his own humdrum life. When this type of understanding is created in the audience; when they realize that those people on the stage have problems fundamentally

similar to theirs; that they love, hate, fear and are happy dependent upon outside forces, then they feel that they have seen something worthwhile and that the evening has been well spent. They leave the theatre with the common bond of brotherhood rooted deeply in their souls and feeling that as a nation, we live, we fight, we die for the common cause of democracy and fellowship of all mankind. There is no hiding from anything. Squalor, faith, poverty, vice, life on a chain gang, illiteracy, disregard of conventions --- any phase of any man's life is presented and no vestige of gruesomeness is withheld. That is what the Little Theatre audiences clamour for and that is what the playwrights give them.

PART VII

THE VALUE OF THE LITTLE THEATRE TO AMERICAN PEOPLE

Dr. Albert Shaw predicted in 1919 that "When every community has its own native group of plays and producers, we shall have a national American Theatre that will give a richly varied, authentic expression of American life. We shall be aware --- which we are only dimly at present --- of the actual pulse of the people by the expression in folk plays of their coordinated minds. It is this common vision, this collective striving that determines nationalism, and remains throughout the ages, the one and only touchstone of the future!"[1]

This prediction has developed into a reality within the last twenty-four years through the untiring efforts of those who realized that simplicity, down-to-earth common sense, and home-spun philosophy can be better appreciated and understood than the proverbial Broadway production. Within this period of time, a group of young playwrights who have dared display their untrained talents, have revolutionized the theatre. It has returned to the "people" and expresses a violent mixture of new ideas and factors in the social and political sphere, it has severed relationship with "commercialism" and has attracted an entirely new group of theatre-goers.

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1. Carolina Folk Plays, Frederick Koch, p. XXVI.

"These young playwrights were sociologists rather than natural-born artists, therefore the short forms were dictated by their deficiences of talent and the limitations of their audiences."[1] The work was negligible as far as fine dramatic art was concerned, but they were indirectly valuable to the Little Theatre in that the audiences were enlarged. Folk, tired to distraction of the films, were seeking refuge and solace in the Little Theatre audience. "The principle of the low-priced theatre culminated in the Federal Theatre."[2] In the meantime, new talent -- real talent, was being discovered and put to work. So great was the influence that Maxwell Anderson and Sidney Kingsley turned their backs upon the general theatre to write "Winterset" and "Dead End", two folk dramas.

Strong new producing groups, such as the Theatre Union and the Repertory Company, were developed because of the movement. The Group Theatre and the Mercury Theatre were affected by it not to mention the Federal Theatre and its leaning toward social drama. Musical revues were subjected to the new idea in the productions, "Parade" and "Pins and Needles" given by Theatre Guild and Labor Stage. One cannot deny that the revolutionary one-act movement wrote an important chapter in the history of the American theatre, and is still writing it although it seemingly reached its peak in the 1936-37 season.

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1. The One-Act Play in the Revolutionary Theatre, John Gossner, p. 246.

2. Ibid, p. 246.

Percy MacKaye, one of the foremost writers of American folk plays, has always seen the theatre as a great creation; a compostion of all arts. He is of the opinion that drama is a proper vehicle for the ideals of democracy. Apparently Dr. Koch and all of his former students in addition to all of the persons who are now writing and producing the one-act folk play, share MacKaye's point of view. One always enjoys and appreciates any subject, any enterprise, any undertaking if it is presented to him on his level of comprehension. On this truth we base our belief that the democratic ideals of our nation; the fundamentals of friendship, and all the various customs and traditions peculiar to various sections are finding true expression through the medium of the theatre and are helping to bind us closer together as a nation of progressive, but simple, peace-loving people.

As a result of the Little Theatre movement and its use of historical and folk material for its productions, the country is more fundamentally patriotic and people of all sections of the country and from all walks of life are united with the common bond of brotherhood. The Little Theatre, through its many needs, gives opportunity to persons interested in numerous other activities aside from acting. It gives an opportunity for self-expression in all phases of work. For purposeful and guided recreation, as well as an educational center, the Little Theatre is a citadel to the American people.

In the opinion of Montrose Moses, "A theatre survey of the country would be invaluable at the present time. I do not believe in standardizing the Little Theatre, for the individual local problem is the vital life of the entire movement".[1] The very fact then that varied problems, the bases for varied plots, add spice to the Little Theatre's programs and create a never-ending interest in the audiences in all parts of the country.

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